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Alaska Department of Fish and Game

NEWS

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Delayed Fortymile Caribou Hunt Opened in Unit 25C

Overharvest Potential is Much Lower

The State of Alaska registration permit hunt for Fortymile caribou (RC867) in Unit 25C east of Preacher Creek, which was postponed last weekend, will open Saturday morning, December 6.

Fish and Game staff will operate a hunter check station during the opening weekend on the Steese Highway for harvest reporting. If successful hunters are not able to report their harvest at the check station, they are required to report in person or by phone to the ADF&G office in Tok within three days of the kill. Permit reports must be dropped off at the Tok office or mailed within seven days of the kill.

"Caribou are now more spread out, but still in the area. We need to monitor the hunt very closely to make sure we don't go over the harvest quota," said Tok Area Biologist Jeff Gross. "Hunters can turn in their permits at the check station and reports will be several days faster than mailing them in."

The harvest quota for Fortymile caribou along the Steese Highway is 180 caribou.

Hunters are encouraged to call the Caribou Hot Line at 1-800-267-2310 for current information about the hunt.

An Emergency Order will be issued by the Department of Fish and Game today to open hunt RC867 in Unit 25C east of Preacher Creek. The hunt was not closed in Units 20B, northern 20E, and 20D and continues in those areas. The hunt was closed in the southern portion of Unit 20E to prevent overharvest of Nelchina caribou that moved into the area. The RC867 season is scheduled to remain open until February 28, 2004, but will be closed sooner if the harvest quota is reached.

The hunt was postponed by Department of Fish and Game to prevent a potential overharvest because thousands of caribou were in close proximity to the Steese highway and weather prevented biologists from flying and determining where they were located.

The Fortymile Caribou Herd Harvest Plan requires the Division of Wildlife Conservation to take action when large numbers of animals are near highways to minimize the chance of excessive roadside harvest, to ensure that the quota is not exceeded, and to allow the herd to cross uninterrupted. The Fortymile Caribou Harvest Plan is designed to increase hunting opportunity but still allow the herd to grow and expand into its former range in Alaska and Yukon.

In late November, biologists radio tracked about one quarter of the radiocollared caribou in the vicinity of Birch Creek, only a few miles from the Steese Highway. Weather prevented staff from flying to the area to locate the animals. With the potential of thousands of caribou on or near the highway, biologists took the conservative approach and delayed the season until they could determine where the caribou were and that the harvest quota was not as likely to be exceeded.

The Fortymile Herd has been growing steadily since 1996 after a management plan developed by an international team was endorsed by the Board of Game and put into effect. The plan was designed to allow the herd to recover from a decades-long decline and ultimately return to traditional range in interior Alaska and Yukon. The Fortymile herd is now the largest caribou herd in Interior Alaska.

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